

# Irish News.

## OUR IRISH LETTER.

(From our own correspondent.)

Dublin, March 23.

### SMALL AND YET GREAT.

Now that the Urban elections are over, it may be asked, in sober earnest, what are these new powers granted to the people, these powers that are intended to make them give over all longings for Home Rule?

They are very small indeed, and they are very great. Very little, inasmuch as the work to be done is the same work that has always had to be done, *i.e.*, the levying of local rates and taxes and the expending of same on the poor and on lunatics, on keeping the towns and country clean and wholesome, and making the towns and country pay for it all.

This is practically what the new Urban, County, and Rural Districts Councils are permitted to do; in a word, precisely what was done before. The difference is that the work will henceforth be in the hands of men and, in certain cases, of women who are in sympathy with the people, who have been elected by the people, who have the interests of their own country and people at heart, and who, if they do not act for the common good, can be turned out by the people. This is where the power is great and is, in a measure, home rule. Hitherto all such power lay in the hands of the landlord class, at least all control over the work paid for by the people, but jobbed and managed so as to suit the ends and needs of a class utterly devoid of patriotism. The whole public work of the country was in the hands of gentlemen who were called county grand jurors—land owners and land agents, with a small, almost infinitesimal sprinkling of that class of wealthy Irish who have been spoiled by generations of English rule, and who, to gain this coveted position, had to forswear all national feeling—beings than whom none can be smaller or meaner. These grand jurors nominated and co-operated with each other, and managed the business of their counties, and spent the ratepayers' money precisely as suited their own interests and the interests of the Government. They were almost invariably strong political partisans, opposed to every thing that could emancipate or give full justice to the real people of the country; averse to every movement that could raise the Irish to any power, political, social, or commercial.

Now, for the first time, free voting and the new Local Government enable the Irish to elect men whom they can trust, men who, feeling where the shoe pinches, can remedy the last; men who, earning and paying the taxes that are spent on public works, can best judge what outlay or what economy will be for the universal good, what are the actual wants, what will best remedy these wants. If the men chosen first do not properly perform their duty, well, as I before said, there is no longer class, clique, or prejudice, no 'oo-opting'; they can be turned out and better men chosen by the electors.

### THE COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS.

So far the elections have been Urban. In April will come the County elections which are finally to supersede the reign of the landlord Grand Jurors. Now, the hitherto rulers under the old system have fought hard and fast, tooth and nail, as the saying is, against this measure. To induce them to give a sort of sulky consent to it, instead of doing as the old Emperor of Germany would have done, pass the law that seemed for the general good, whether any one class liked it or not, Parliament bribed the Irish landlords with a great and unjust bribe. It freed them—the impoverishers of three-fourths of our poor—from what is known as poor rates. In other words, gave them £400,000 a year and turned over the support of the poor on the shoulders of the already over-burdened taxpayers. In spite of this, the landlords are working heaven and earth to be permitted to have their cake and eat it. They are coaxing, praying, begging, even threatening in order to get elected on the new councils. One noble lord, of yachting notoriety, is credited with holding almost a threat of eviction over the heads of his tenantry if they do not return him as member of the local County Council.

The Irish, on their side, have taken hold of this new power to work it, as they honestly and candidly say, for the improvement of the country and as a means towards the genuine Home Rule. To this end they are electing men known to be of national politics, but also known to be good men of business, who will not, and, in fact, cannot (they will be too well watched) job out the public money to their sisters, their cousins, and their aunts. We may now literally take in the latter as the new law says that, 'Every person, whether

a man, a woman, or a peer,' is entitled to be on the register of voters, and a man, a woman, or a peer can likewise be on certain of the councils, and a woman can be chairman of the Urban District Council. It was not an Irishman given to making bulls who worded these regulations, making a chairman of a woman and leaving it to be inferred that a peer is looked upon as the missing link in creation.

However, while politely—and not unnaturally—preferring to give our own men a fair trial, seeing that we pay the piper and consequently have the calling of the tune, the landlords have only to produce tried men of their class who have been genuinely friends of the people, and such men will be warmly welcomed. I fear many cannot be found, but none need fear the want of courtesy, no more than they need look for the forced subservency of old ascendancy days. I cannot give a better example of the general tone of the electors at this momentous crisis than by quoting a few words spoken by the Bishop of Armagh at a convention held in his diocese for the purpose of selecting candidates for the County Council: ' . . . . You will see that we make no dictation to any constituency. There must, as long as human nature remains imperfect, always exist rivalry and jealousy and selfishness amongst us. None of us is perfect. But let us try, in memory of a common ideal in the past—which is recognised as the best knitter of brotherly love—let us, in this eventful year of national dawn, try to minimise these evils. . . . I would take the liberty of addressing one word of warning to candidates and electors. To the former I should say: Seek not your own interests so much as the honour and fair name of your motherland. Learn before you seek the people's suffrages the great responsibilities that will devolve upon you. You must see your way to devote your time and your serious attention, and your solid, patient labour many days in the year to your duties. Don't undertake the work unless you are in a position to make these sacrifices. If your election is contested, don't allow your reason and dignity to be obscured by passion. Don't indulge in bitter and reproachful words; they cause a wound that festers and tortures when their memory should be blotted out. . . . To the electors I should say: You have every opportunity in the secrecy of the ballot to act honestly for your country. You have a sacred trust given you, and do not tamper with it. Let your vote be given to merit, and not to favour or affection. You are all sensible, and, for the most part, educated men and women. Study the lives and of the different candidates that come before you. Your conscience will then dictate the course you are to follow.'

This is a rather lengthy dissertation on our County Council elections, but they are the great Irish question of the day. They do not, however, prevent pleasures from brightening life, and even though we are in lenten season, when the great majority of the Irish people abstain from public amusements, the court balls and dinners, levées and drawingrooms at Dublin Castle are in full swing under the *regime* of Lord and Lady Cadogan, the season to wind up after Easter with the race week, during which the Duke and Duchess of York are to visit Dublin.

We have an old clan song on one side of my family, 'John O'Dwyer of the glen,' the first line of which runs:

'TIS PAST THE WOODS ARE FALLING,'

in reference to the wholesale destruction (during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) of the woods of Ireland, in order that the outraged owners of the land might not even have the shelter of their own woods when stripped of their castles and lands by Acts of Parliament passed to enrich royal favourites or to reward those who lent money to pay English troops. Many of the woods grew up again and formed no small part of the natural beauty that fills Irish hearts with love of our 'fond and fair land' and attracts lovers of scenery from other countries. For some years past the question of compulsory purchase of the vast estates throughout Ireland and the resale of them for the benefit of the tenantry, has, as you know, been frequently debated, and it is thought will eventually have to be made law. In anticipation of this, numbers of alien estate owners throughout the land are wantonly ruining the beauty of the fairest scenes, as well as injuring the climate by the wholesale destruction of woods on their property. In this way, a great part of the far-famed Vale of Avoca has been stripped of the timber that made it so fair, and its stately trees have been converted into matches! And now Mr. John Parnell (brother of Mr. Charles S. Parnell), owner of Avondale, is at the same unparliamentary work.

Speaking of the Parnell family, none of the late leader's parliamentary colleagues approve of the *Life* published by Mr. Barry O'Brien. According to their judgment, a much better biography is nearly ready for the press.

The name of O'Brien reminds me of a comical trick played upon the Government by a friend of Mr. William O'Brien, which

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